



Community 101

The unwritten rules, written down. This lesson covers the social architecture of OTT events: how to watch a scene respectfully, what confidentiality actually requires of you, the etiquette around shared gear and shared space, what to do when something worries you, and how the community itself works — including the patterns of drama, power, and long-term participation that aren't usually named out loud but shape what the room feels like to be in.

READ THIS BEFORE YOUR FIRST EVENT

Anxiety on your first night is normal — everyone you'll see has been the new person before. The community is, on the whole, welcoming. What's *not* on the surface is the set of unwritten rules experienced members operate by. Come back to this after a few months, when the language starts to settle.

What you'll be able to do

By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to...

- **Watch** a scene respectfully — and **borrow** shared gear — without breaking the room's unwritten rules.
- **Apply** the one-line confidentiality test: if it involves another member, it stays inside; if it's only you, it's yours.
- **Choose** the right move when you recognise someone out of context, or when a scene worries you — fetch a DM, don't approach the players.
- **Manage** your own disclosure across the five levels, and **bring** a new partner in without surprising anyone.
- **Recognise** the patterns of drama, influence, and tenure — and decline being pulled into a conflict.

Every other Foundations class teaches you something you *do* — how consent gets negotiated, how a scene is built, how a power exchange is held. This one teaches you how to *be in the room* while other people do those things around you. The skills are quieter — where to stand, what to repeat, what to keep to yourself — but they are the ones the community notices first, because they are the ones that decide whether a near-stranger feels safe playing within sight of you.

It helps to read the chapters that follow as a single instinct rehearsed from several angles: **protect the room, and the room protects you.** Confidentiality, the distance you keep from a scene, the way you route a worry to a DM rather than the players — they are all the same reflex pointed at different situations. Learn the reflex once and most of the specifics follow.

In this lesson: being present — watching, confidentiality, and recognising someone out of context (§ I–III) · the shared room — borrowing gear and raising a worry (§ IV–V) · your circle, in person and online (§ VI–VII) · who feels welcome and managing how out you are (§ VIII–IX) · the social currents — drama, tenure, and mentorship (§ X–XI).

I. Watching Scenes

Most of what you learn in your first months, you learn by watching. The community

welcomes it — within rules.

☐ **Keep your distance.** Far enough back that you're not in the players' field. They can see you exist; they shouldn't *feel* you. If "back" means the wall, lean on the wall and stop moving.

☐ **Silence.** No commentary, no questions to the person next to you, phone visibly off. If you have a reaction you can't suppress, step out, breathe, come back.

☐ **Don't talk to the players** — not during, not in the aftermath. People in aftercare are not on duty; they came to play, not to teach. "Wow, how did you do that?" waits for a social context.

☐ **Learn through proper channels.** Take mental notes, then get the technique from a class, a mentor, or the person at a different time. Asking another spectator to explain is a smaller version of the same disturbance.

TRY THIS

Plan your first visit before you go. Decide which event you'll start with — a munch is the gentlest on-ramp — and picture exactly where you'll stand to watch a scene: far enough back that the players can see you exist but won't *feel* you. Knowing your spot in advance turns "where do I even put myself?" into a non-question on the night.

II. Confidentiality, in Practice

Not a slogan — the operating principle that holds the community together. It breaks in

specific, predictable ways.

Breaks confidentiality

- Naming another member to a third party — “Bob from accounting was there” — even to someone you trust.
- Posting photos from inside the venue, even with no people visible. The space is identifying.
- “Someone who looked like [public figure] was there” — the same act with deniability stitched on.
- Describing a scene you witnessed in a way that identifies the participants, even without names.
- Telling one member that another was present — even inside the community — if they weren’t at the same event.

Doesn’t

- Talking about *your own* attendance — “I went out Friday” is yours to say.
- General community talk in member-only spaces (the chat, discussion groups).
- Talking privately with another member who was present, about your own experience.

THE RULE OF THUMB

If naming or describing involves *another member*, it doesn’t leave the community. If it involves only *you*, it’s yours.

TRY THIS

Imagine telling a vanilla friend about a great night out. Write the two or three sentences you’d actually say — then run each through the rule of thumb. Anything that names, locates, or describes *another* member gets cut or rephrased to be about *you*. Doing this once on paper builds the reflex you’ll need in a live conversation.

III. Recognising Someone Out of Context

You spot a coworker, a member of your religious community, a public-facing professional. Treat them like any other member — because they are one.

Ignore the outside-world context entirely and let them decide whether to acknowledge you. The same holds for **press, journalists, and curious family**: the community's answer is generally no — not out of shame, but because the cost of being seen accurately is higher than the benefit. If you're contacted about the community, tell a host; don't speak on its behalf. A curious family member is your conversation to have, under the same rule: talk about *yourself*, not other members.

WHAT YOU DON'T DO WHEN YOU RECOGNISE SOMEONE

Don't tell a host (hosts aren't a confidentiality safety valve — it's the same breach). Don't privately ask if they need support (you'd be importing the very context confidentiality keeps out). Don't avoid them all evening (the avoidance is louder than acknowledgment). Treat them as a member.

IV. Borrowing Gear

Implements get shared at events. The rules are short and non-negotiable.

- ☐ **Explicit consent each time.** Not “they said yes last month,” not “they’re not using it.” A specific ask, a specific yes — even between regular partners.
- ☐ **Sanitise before AND after.** Before protects you from what was on it; after protects the next borrower (including the owner). Use the sealed wipes the venue keeps for this.
- ☐ **Match the skill.** Don't use an unfamiliar tool on an unfamiliar receiver without supervision — that combination is where injuries hide.

The owner doesn't need to stand and watch — they're trusting you with it; that's the consent.

V. When Something Worries You — Fetch a DM

A bottom looking uncomfortable when their top hasn't noticed. A scene heading somewhere the negotiation didn't seem to cover.

TELL A DM OR HOST — NOT THE PLAYERS

DMs are at the event for exactly this. They assess from a calmer distance than you can mid-reaction, and intervene without making it personal or escalating. Approaching the players yourself can wreck a fine scene or insert you into something harder to resolve. “Wait and see” risks deterioration; “mention it after” delays help that may matter now. If it’s nothing, the DM will say so. Silence is the worst option — it reads as agreement and lets the pattern continue.

How to actually flag it

The mechanics are simple. Find the DM — the venue makes clear who they are — approach quietly, lead with *what you saw*, give the location, and step back. The whole thing takes about ten seconds.

A GOOD FLAG, AND A BAD ONE

Good: “The scene on the bench in the back corner — the bottom’s gone quiet and stopped answering the top’s check-ins, and I’m not sure he’s clocked it. Might be nothing.”

Bad: “That one’s abuse — you need to go stop them.”

The first hands over a place, an observation, and an honest maybe — everything a DM needs to go and look. The second hands over a verdict and a demand, deciding the very thing the DM is there to weigh. Either way, once you’ve handed it off, step back: hovering to watch whether they act is its own disturbance.

TRY THIS

Say a flag out loud and listen to your own voice. The skill isn’t the words — it’s keeping the tone *observation*, *not accusation*, and matter-of-fact rather than urgent. A calm flag is what lets a DM move in without the whole room turning to look.

VI. Bringing a New Partner

A munch is a low-stakes social mixer — bring someone, introduce them around. A play event is the deep end. Bring a partner there only after they understand:

- ☐ **How confidentiality works** — because they have to keep it too.
- ☐ **What they'll see, concretely** — not “people doing things” but specifics that match the event.
- ☐ **Their role** — to watch, to play, or to be your partner-of-record while you play. Different roles, different responsibilities.
- ☐ **They can leave at any point**, including before they see anything — and you'll go with them. They don't have to talk to anyone or “perform” being there.

Surprise nobody. And if *you're* the one being brought: it's your call. “Curious but not sure,” “I'll come but only to watch,” and “I don't want to” are all complete answers. Your partner's love of the community is theirs to carry, not yours to inherit.

VII. Online Behaviour

Your online conduct with OTT members should match your in-person conduct. There aren't separate norms for chat.

- **Confidentiality applies in DMs and public posts.** “Just a joke” doesn't make a comment OK — read it as if the recipient is tired, twenty minutes before bed.
- **Let members initiate the social-media follow**, not you. Don't friend-request based on a name you learned at an event.
- **Take concerns to a host or the moderators**, not into a public channel.
- **Don't archive screenshots of community conversations.** The “save for later” pattern is one of the more corrosive things a member can do to trust.

- **Be careful with public posts** where members can connect each other's usernames — even nondescript content connects dots.

VIII. Accommodation & Who Feels Welcome

A community is only as good as it is for its less-represented members. Two things to carry.

Disability accommodation

Asked-for and given, not assumed. A wheelchair user might want help to a play space — or might not. *Ask*. Don't volunteer help that wasn't requested. If a space doesn't work for someone's mobility, sensory, or cognitive needs, flag it to a host — the community is small enough that fixes happen. In-scene accommodations are a negotiation topic, not an assumption.

Race and the local scene

The local scene is predominantly white — worth naming, because it shapes who feels welcome and who feels watched. Members from racially marginalised groups carry an extra layer of scrutiny that white members don't.

WHAT THE CONSENT PRINCIPLE LOOKS LIKE HERE

Race play is never a default move — if a member of colour wants to negotiate it, that's their initiation; nobody else brings it up. "I don't see race" isn't a virtue; colour-blindness makes microaggressions easier, not harder. Members of colour aren't spokespeople or educators by default. And "where are you *really* from?" / "your hair is so interesting" land badly however well-intentioned — what you'd ask any other member is the floor.

TRY THIS

Name three local norms you'd want to ask a host or mentor about before your first event — for example, how this group handles photos, what the gear-sanitising setup is, or who the DMs are and how to find them. Writing them down now means you arrive with questions instead of guesses, and gives you an easy, low-stakes reason to start a conversation.

IX. Coming Out: Managed Disclosure

“Being out” doesn’t mean the same thing in every context. You don’t have to be at the same level for every audience.

To yourself

The internal acceptance.

Within the community

Members know each other; the community is the inside.

To friends / family

Close people, who may or may not be in the community.

Professionally

Colleagues, employers, professional networks.

Publicly

Searchable. Permanent.

A common pattern: out within the community, out to a few trusted friends, not out at work, definitely not out publicly. Whatever you choose, it’s yours — the practical opsec that protects it:



Use a scene name separate from your legal one. Once you’ve given out your legal name, you can’t take it back.



Keep online presences separate — community under one identity, professional life under another. Don’t let them touch.



Be careful with photos. A scene photo at the wrong angle can identify you even with the face cropped.



Search yourself periodically — see what an interested stranger would. And don’t pressure members at a different level of disclosure than yours.

X. Drama, Power & Tenure

Every community has drama; OTT is small enough that it ripples. A few patterns to recognise and manage.

Whisper networks

Useful for warning about predators; dangerous when used to settle grievances. Ask: is this naming a *pattern*, or one person's history with another?

Triangulation

"A told me B said you said..." Take it directly to whoever it's supposedly from. Triangulation feeds itself; direct conversation interrupts the chain.

Recruited into a conflict

You can decline. "I'm sorry you're going through this; I don't want to be in the middle" is a complete sentence.

Public escalation

Airing grievances in public channels almost always makes it worse. Direct, then mediated through a host, then stepping away — in that order. Stay off public channels until you've exhausted the private ones.

INFLUENCE ISN'T ALWAYS TITLED — AND TENURE ISN'T IMMUNITY

Some members shape the community without any formal role. Watch for influence used to *isolate* (a senior member whose negative opinion of someone spreads fast), self-appointed gatekeepers who decide who gets vouched for, and "you can't complain about X, they've been here forever." Tenure isn't immunity. If you're senior, the cover you have is for modelling the behaviour you want copied — including owning your mistakes out loud.

XI. Mentorship

Real and valuable — and a structure that gets misused. It's fine to ask ("I'd like to learn rope, would you be open to teaching me?"); if they say no, accept it cleanly.

Healthy mentorship

- A more experienced member shares specific knowledge in a relationship that's *explicit about what it is*.
- The mentor gets the satisfaction of teaching; the mentee owes nothing beyond engaging with the material.
- It does **not** require play. If mentor and mentee do play, that's a separate, explicit decision negotiated *outside* the mentorship frame — never assumed because of it.

Be careful around

- "Mentorship" that drifts fast toward play, framed as part of the learning.
- Mentors who isolate mentees from other members.
- Mentors who present themselves as the only correct teacher of their craft.
- Criticism that undermines confidence rather than building skill.

KEY TAKEAWAY

If you remember one thing: **protect the room, and the room protects you.** Almost every norm here resolves to one of two reflexes — keep confidentiality (anything about *another* member stays inside), and route concerns to a host or DM rather than handling them yourself. Get those two right and the rest of this lesson is detail.

What Veterans Owe Newer Members

We opened with the *unwritten rules, written down* — the social architecture that lets a room of near-strangers trust each other. The flip side is who maintains it: everyone you'll meet was once the new person, and the members who stick around for years navigate things newer members don't see yet — burnout, handing off leadership gracefully, returning after a break to a community that's changed. The through-line, and what long-time members owe the people just arriving:

- **Visibility.** Be findable. Newer members shouldn't have to chase you for a conversation.
- **Honesty about your own learning.** “I learned that by getting it wrong a few times” demystifies the path better than “I just always knew.”
- **The benefit of the doubt.** A newer member doing something slightly off is usually inexperienced, not malicious.
- **Repair when you're the experienced one who got it wrong.** You have the most cover — use it to model owning mistakes.
- **Step back before you overstay.** When burnout comes, step back rather than push through; hand off leadership deliberately. Holding on past the point of usefulness costs the community more than it gives.
- **Don't make the community a stage for your own taste.** Influence is for service, not for shaping the room into something that suits you at the expense of who else fits in.

OFF THE TRAXX · FOUNDATIONS

The community only works because people can trust the room. Confidentiality, etiquette, and the quiet patterns of power and care are what make it safe enough for everyone to show up as themselves — including you, on your first night.

Foundations curriculum · welcome. There's no path here that's wrong.